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# Some Elizabethan Opinions of the Poetry and Character of Ovid

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND  
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BY

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The literary fortunes of the Roman poet Ovid are little short of the marvelous. Accorded among his own people a rank second only to that of Virgil, distinguished for admirable narrative, tender elegy, and for at least one notable experiment in tragedy—the lost *Medea*, he received even in his own lifetime that striking mixture of praise and censure that has continued to the present.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout mediæval literature his influence was potent and pervasive.<sup>2</sup> He appears in various ways in Italian, Provençal, Spanish, Bohemian, German, Icelandic, French, and English. He was a main source of inspiration for the first part of the *Roman de la*

<sup>1</sup> For remarks of Seneca and of Quintilian on the character of Ovid, see Teuffel-Schwabe-Warr: *Hist. of Roman Lit.*, I, p. 495.

<sup>2</sup> The character and extent of the references to Ovid during the Middle Ages in England may be seen in part by consulting the carefully prepared indexes to the following: (Rolls Series.)

Warner, G. F.: Giraldi Cambrensis Opera. VIII vols.

Haydon, F. S.: Eulogium Historiarum.

Anstey, H.: Munimenta Academica. II vols.

Riley, H. T.: Chronica Monasterii S. Albani.

Luard, H. R.: Roberti Grosseteste . . . . Epistolae.

Luard, H. R.: Annales Monastici.

Lumby, J. R.: Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden. IX vols.

Wright, Th.: Alexandri Neckham de Naturis Rerum Libri Duo.

Madden, Sir F.: Matthæi Parisiensis Historia Anglorum. III vols.

Luard, H. R.: Flores Historiarum.

The most extensive collection of mediæval citations of Ovid is in Manitius: *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Ovid im Mittelalter*. Philologus, Suppl. VII (1899), pp. 721 ff.

No study of Ovid in mediæval literature such as Comparetti's *Virgilio nell medio evo* has yet appeared. The following references are of value:

Bartsch, Karl: Albrecht von Halberstadt und Ovid im Mittelalter. Quedlinburg, 1861.

Belloni, Egidio: Note sulle traduzione dell' Arte Amatoria e dei Remedia Amoris d'Ovidio anteriori al Rinascimento. Bergamo, 1892. Completed study, Turin, 1900 [Romania, 22, 339, and 29, 630].

Cloetta, W.: Beiträge zur Litteraturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance. Erster Theil, Halle, 1890. P. 164 ff.

Dernedde, R.: Über die den altfr. Dichtern bekannten epischen Stoffe aus dem Altertum. Göttingen, 1887.

Kühlhorn, G.: Das Verhältnis der Art d'amors des Jacques d'Amiens zu Ovids Ars amatoria. Quedlinburg, 1908.

*Rose*,<sup>3</sup> and he supplied a code of laws for the Courts of Love.<sup>4</sup> The poem *Flamenca*, says Mr. Ker, "is really the triumph of Ovid over all his Gothic contemporaries."<sup>5</sup> Monastic annalists frequently quote him,<sup>6</sup> and the numerous manuscripts bear witness to his popularity.<sup>7</sup> Dante makes some hundred references to Ovid, and ranks him third among the four great poets of the world.<sup>8</sup> Chaucer and Gower knew him well, as did a host of lesser men.<sup>9</sup> The mediæval mind, however, approached the classics in its own way. The schoolmen admired Virgil's Fourth Eclogue because they saw there a prophecy of the birth of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Allegorizing was the recognized mode of interpretation; and the ingenuity that exercised itself on the mystic properties of numbers and the hidden significations of the parts of speech saw justifiable meanings in even the most licentious passages in Ovid, and insisted that here also were moral and religious lessons had one but the wit to find them.<sup>11</sup> As Canon

Neilson, W. A.: *The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love*. Harvard Studies and Notes—Vol. VI, pp. 170-212, The Ovidian Tradition.

Runge, O.: *Die Metamorphoseon-Verdeutschung Albrechts von Halberstadt*. Berlin, 1908. Palaestra—No. 73.

Sudre, L.: *Publii Ovidii Metamorphoseon libros quomodo nostrates medii aevi poetæ imitati interpretatique sunt*. Paris, 1893. [Romania, 22, 242].

Sandys, J. E.: *History of Classical Scholarship*. Cambridge, 1906. Page 638.

Seldmayer, H.: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ovid-Studien im Mittelalter*. Wiener Studien, VI. 1884.

<sup>3</sup> E. Langlois: *Origines et sources du Roman de la Rose*, pp. 69-75.

<sup>4</sup> L. F. Mott: *The Court of Love*, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> *Epic and Romance*, p. 361.

<sup>6</sup> Indexes to the Rolls Series.

<sup>7</sup> Teuffel-Schwabe-Warr: *Hist. of Roman Lit.*, I, sec. 249, note 3.

<sup>8</sup> Scartazzini: *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, II, p. 1412.

Moore: *Studies in Dante*, pp. 206-228.

*Inferno*, Canto IV, line 90.

<sup>9</sup> Skeat: *Chaucer*, VI, p. 387.

Lounsbury: *Studies in Chaucer*, II, 251-252.

G. C. Macaulay: *The Complete Works of John Gower*, IV, p. 369 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Greenough: *The Greater Poems of Virgil*, notes, p. 27.

For the best account of the legend, see Comparetti: *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, Eng. trans. by Benecke.

<sup>11</sup> See below, note 46.



J. Janssen has shown, mediæval writers employed such Latin authors as they knew as aids toward a deeper knowledge of Christianity and as incentives toward a purer moral life.<sup>12</sup>

In the Renaissance also Ovid was a great favorite with painter, poet, and cultivated readers generally.<sup>13</sup> To an astonishingly early reading of that poet Montaigne ascribed his love of literature, although in later life his fondness for Ovid left him.<sup>14</sup> Clement Marot promised: "de tout mon poveroir suyvre et contrefaire la veine du noble poëte Ovide."<sup>15</sup> Of the whole Rhetorical School in France, M. Guy observes: "Le poete qu'ils preferent, c'est Ovide; viennent ensuite Virgile, Horace, Terence."<sup>16</sup> During the same period, however, appeared also the note of disparagement or censure, as may be seen in the following opinions. Thus in 1450 Æneas Sylvius remarked in his *De Liberorum Educatione*: "Ubique tristis, ubique dulcis est, in plerisque tamen locis nimium lascivus."<sup>17</sup> And Ludovicus Vives, whose writings were widely influential, observed in his *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, 1555: "Imo vero amissa sunt tot philosophorum et sacrorum autorum monumenta, et grave erit et non ferendum facinus, si Tibullus pereat aut Ars Amandi Nasonis."<sup>18</sup> The latter statement is not, of course, to be interpreted as evidence of a special attack on Ovid. As will appear in the course of the discussion, it is really but a part of the prevailing attitude toward the claims of poetry. But it shows that in the very heyday of his fame doubt and censure were mingled with the praise of Ovid.

That Elizabethan poets and playwrights had a special fondness for the poetry of Ovid has long been a commonplace of English

<sup>12</sup> J. Janssen: *History of the German People at the Close of the Middle Ages*. English trans., London, 1896. I, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> The painters of the Renaissance found Ovid a source of suggestion for mythological subjects. Cf. Schoenfeld, P.: *Ovids Metamorphosen in ihrem Verhältnis zur antiken Kunst*. Wunderer, W.: *Ovids Werke in ihrem Verhältnis zur antiken Kunst*.

<sup>14</sup> Montaigne: *Essays*, trans. by Cotton, I, p. 204.

<sup>15</sup> *Oeuvres de Clement Marot*, Lyon, 1870. II, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> *L'Ecole des Rhétoriciens*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Elyot: *The Governour*. Ed. Croft, I, p. 124, note.

<sup>18</sup> *Ib.*

literary history.<sup>19</sup> Mr. Alfred Dorrinck, in the conclusion of his dissertation, *Die lateinischen Zitate in den Dramen der wichtigsten Vorgänger Shakespeares*, p. 75, gives the following table of citations: Catullus 1, Cicero 11, Claudian 1, Gellius 1, Horace 16, Juvenal 3, Lucan 1, Martial 1, Ovid 54, Plautus 11, Pliny 1, Publilius Syrus 1, Seneca 7, Statius 1, Terence 14, Virgil 12. Herein he sees, "Die grosse Vorliebe der Elisabethaner für Ovid." This judgment is further supported by the investigations of Mr. Karl Frey.<sup>20</sup> In his essay, *Ovid and Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Sidney Lee has sketched the vogue of Ovid from 1200 to 1700, maintaining that the poet appealed to readers of all classes and was an educational manual in all schools and colleges of the Sixteenth Century.<sup>21</sup> Here, as well as in his *Life of Shakespeare*,<sup>22</sup> he points out the latter's indebtedness to Ovid, a view thoroughly confirmed by Mr. R. K. Root.<sup>23</sup> In the same way Mr. R. Bayley regards "ultra-classicism" as a characteristic of the Elizabethan drama, even of the plays destined solely for the popular stage. "To the plebeian crowd," he thinks, "fully one-half of the Elizabethan drama must have been caviare utterly beyond their reach."<sup>24</sup>

Mr. McKerrow, however, in his edition of Nashe, reaches the conclusion that Roman authors were not the favorite reading of the average literary man of the period.<sup>25</sup> Hence, "the ultimate debt of Elizabethan literature to the classics is hardly at all a debt at first hand." The reason given for this latter view is that there were numerous collections of scraps of Latin, from which Nashe and others might have drawn. Numbers of illustrations and proverbs in Latin were current. Such books as Lilly's *Latin Grammar*, Erasmus's *Parabolae*, or the *Sententiae Pueriles* would serve as sources

<sup>19</sup> *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, IV, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> *Die klassische Götter- und Heldensage in den Dramen von Marlowe, Lyly, Kyd, Greene und Peele*. Karlsruhe, 1909.

<sup>21</sup> *Quarterly Review*, No. 210.

<sup>22</sup> Ed. of 1909, p. 262.

<sup>23</sup> *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare*, pp. 3-10.

Cf. H. R. D. Anders: *Shakespeare's Books*, pp. 21-30.

<sup>24</sup> *The Shakespeare Symphony*, Ch. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Vol. V, p. 133 ff.

for large numbers of the quotations of the time. "Interlarding one's work with quotations was a favorite practice." In the case of Nashe, his reading "seems to have been limited to Ovid, a play of Plautus, the Epistles of Horace, and perhaps some plays of Terence." Nashe has one hundred quotations from Ovid, twenty from Homer, and twelve from Virgil.<sup>26</sup> But so many of these are vague in character or had appeared in Lilly, that Nashe "need never have opened a volume of Ovid in his life."<sup>27</sup>

The importance of the foregoing will escape no one. In any problem of classical influence in the Sixteenth Century it will not suffice merely to exhibit an array of quotations or allusions. An effort must be made to discover whether the author is depending on current collections of sayings or on his own reading of the classics.<sup>28</sup> Particularly does this condition apply to the work of so eminently quotable an author as Ovid. For citations from him appear in the school grammars of both Linacre and Lilly.<sup>29</sup> In the school curricula he has a prominent place. Thus Wolsey's plan of studies for Ipswich School (1528) directed: "The party in the seventh Form should regularly have in hand either Horace's *Epistles* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or *Fasti*."<sup>30</sup> Bishop Pilkington's Statutes of Rivington Grammar School (1566) recommended, among other Latin texts, *Epistolae Ovidii*.<sup>31</sup> Brinsley translated *Tristia* and *Metamorphoses* according to his own special plan of instruction, and recommended versification on Ovidian models.<sup>32</sup> Hoole recommended that *De Tristibus* be learned memoriter, "to impart a lively pattern of hexameters and pentameters."<sup>33</sup>

To the Elizabethan reader, as to all others, a chief source of attraction in Ovid lay in his superb gift as a story-teller. And

<sup>26</sup> See Vol. V, p. 313, for Index of Allusions.

<sup>27</sup> *Ib.*, p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. B. Ogle: *Classical Literary Tradition in Early German and Romance Literature*. Mod. Lang. Notes, Dec., 1912.

<sup>29</sup> Watson, F.: *The English Grammar Schools to 1660*, p. 245.

<sup>30</sup> *Ib.*, p. 472.

<sup>31</sup> *Ib.*, p. 472.

<sup>32</sup> *Ib.*, p. 357.

<sup>33</sup> *Ib.*, p. 371.

although in him as in Spenser, "the narrative may be said to fall below the highest order in that the independence of the character is merged in description and sequence of events",<sup>34</sup> he remains one of the favorite narrative poets of the world. By common consent, he is master of the art of transition and skillful variation of material. With unerring instinct he seizes upon the essentials of his narrative, apparently with no thought of any lesson to teach or moral to impart. Of the *Metamorphoses* Mackail justly observes: "One might almost say that it is without moral quality. Ovid narrates the treachery of Scylla or the incestuous passion of Myrrha with the same light and secure touch as he applies to the charming idyl of Baucis and Philémon or the love-tale of Pyramus and Thisbe; his interest is in what happened, in the story for the story's sake."<sup>35</sup> The Elizabethan poet and his audience were almost as insistent upon story.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, Ovid was a master of verse-form. As a result of his extraordinary mastery of the elegiac couplet: "The usage was stereotyped by his example; all through the Empire and the Middle Ages, and even down to the present day, the Ovidian metre has been the single dominant type: and though no one ever managed it with such ingenuity again, he taught enough of the secret to make its use possible for almost every kind of subject."<sup>37</sup> "For the metre of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid chose the heroic hexameter, but he used it in a strikingly new and original way . . . . Ovid's hexameter is a thing of his own. It becomes with him almost a new metre—light, brilliant, and rapid, but with some monotony of cadence, and without the deep swell that it had, not in Virgil only, but in his

<sup>34</sup> W. P. Ker: *Epic and Romance*, p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> *Latin Literature*, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> Specific obligations of the dramatists to Ovid are presented in:

Dorricck, A.: *Die lateinischen Zitate in den Dramen der wichtigsten Vorgänger Shakespeares*. Strassburg, 1907.

Frey, K.: *Die klassische Götter- und Heldensage in den Dramen von Marlowe, Lyly, Kyd, Greene und Peele*. Karlsruhe, 1909.

Kettler, F.: *Lateinische Zitate in den Dramen der namhaften Zeitgenossen Shakespeares*. Strassburg, 1909.

Rupf, P.: *Die Zauberkomödie vor Shakespeare*.

Root, R. K.: *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare*.

<sup>37</sup> Mackail: *Latin Literature*, p. 138.

predecessors. The swift, equable movement is admirably adapted to the matter of the poem." <sup>38</sup>

Ovid's gift of penetrating insight into human character, especially so far as its foibles and weaknesses are concerned, also must have appealed to an age that delighted in the satirist and the character writer. He furnished some of the keenest shafts in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*.<sup>39</sup>

Professedly devoted to the ideas and fashions of his own times, Ovid is one of the nearest to us of the poets of the ancient world. He expresses his own attitude thus:

Prisca iuvent alios, ego me nunc denique natum

Gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis.

And this might have served as a motto for the Elizabethan.

Moreover, the poetry of Ovid has the charm of romantic atmosphere and suggestiveness, which has often been compared to the *Arabian Nights*. The world of the *Metamorphoses* is not the actual world; it is pervaded by the fabulous and the superhuman. Simcox calls the poem "the most romantic work in Latin literature."<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the strongest single reason for the popularity of Ovid lies in what Mr. Ronald Bayne calls "the intensely sensuous nature of the Elizabethan";<sup>41</sup> and Professor Saintsbury, "the peculiar Renaissance note, the union of sensual and intellectual rapture."<sup>42</sup>

The greatest value of Ovid as a source lies in the fact that his works are a storehouse of classic myths. Not only did he present the great stories of Greece and Rome with freshness, charm and permanent power of appeal; but he transmitted a rich fund of mythological lore the sources of which are frequently obscured or lost beyond recovery. It was largely or entirely through the poems of Ovid that many writers became acquainted with the riches of classical mythology. Nowhere else was such a wealth of legend to be found in so attractive a form.

<sup>38</sup> *Ib.*, p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> P. Chasles: *Théâtre anglais*, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> *History of Latin Literature*, I, p. 354.

<sup>41</sup> *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, VI, p. 370.

<sup>42</sup> *Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, p. 268.

In the following pages an attempt is made to assemble the more typical expressions of opinion with regard to the poetry and character of Ovid. The one aim has been to try to see the poet as the Elizabethans saw him. To the possible objection that there was no "Elizabethan" attitude on this matter, that the citations represent only partial, scattered, and individual views, it may be replied that this must be true of almost any other similar study. In dealing with matters of this kind, one must not lose sight of the fact that one has to do with varying expressions of personal feeling and judgment, and must not obscure the situation with any general term. At the same time Hennequin has shown the value of noting the groups of admirers and critics of a widely influential writer in order to form thereby some conception of the literary and moral ideals of a given epoch.<sup>43</sup> What the Elizabethans thought of Ovid is not, so far as classical scholarship is concerned, a matter of very great moment. As a side-light on their ideas and tastes, what they thought of the poet has its interest, as indeed must everything have that relates to this fascinating period. Moreover, the attitude of the times under consideration toward Ovid was, in the main, but part of a larger and far more vital question—the right of poetry to exist.

As for the expressions of concern for poetry and for some at least of the more or less labored and pedantic defenses that figure in the ensuing pages, the reader may perhaps feel—

Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis  
tempus eget.

But such was by no means the position of those whose utterances are to be here considered. Those who really believed that much of the poetry regarded as classic offended the moral or religious sensibilities, demanded an answer to charges which they preferred insistently and in language that could not be mistaken. These charges were not infrequently occasions for embarrassment and for resort to what may sometimes appear to us mere tricks of desperation. It remained for Sir Philip Sidney to make the one great apology of his time by transcending in a serene and noble way the turmoil and logomachy which is here passed in review.

<sup>43</sup> *La Critique Scientifique*. Paris, 1888.

Widely scattered and radically differing expressions of opinion with regard to the personality and works of Ovid appear in England from Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Governour* (1531) to Dryden's *Preface to the Fables* (1700). With very general agreement that the poems often give occasion for offense to the moral sense, and in some instances with extremely plain speaking upon this matter, writers commonly see one of two possibilities. Some would condemn the poems to what they regarded as well-merited oblivion, while others would have recourse to what they considered a sort of Higher Criticism. They would separate the good from the evil in the poems, and ignoring or forgetting the latter, make the utmost profit out of the good. On their favorite analogy of the bee, which extracts honey from even the most poisonous plants, they would, moreover, find some profit in the evil itself. The latter very naturally, therefore, attach peculiar importance to the manner of reading or interpretation. Moralization, based on the assumed underlying allegory, or in some cases very numerous allegories, is the alchemy with which they would transmute the baser metal. What appears to the hasty reader or to the untrained mind as a "filthy fable" must in this view be "moralized in its kind"; whereupon it yields matter "both pleasant and profitable," thereby justifying the oft-quoted Horatian maxim.

This method of interpretation goes back, of course, to the "moralized Ovids" of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, and is typified by the *Metamorphosis Ovidiana moraliter a Magistro Thoma Walley's Anglico de professione Praedicatorum sub sanctissimo patre Dominico explanata*. This work was first printed at Paris in 1509; and again in 1510, with the text of Ovid, at Lyons. J. B. Hauréau<sup>44</sup> has shown that Thomas of Wales really had nothing to do with this work, which is to be ascribed to Pierre Bersuire, (d. 1362). Mr. F. G. Stokes, in his edition of *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*,<sup>45</sup> gives an illuminating specimen of the four-fold method of interpretation in the work of Bersuire. It may be taken as typical of its kind. Applying this method to the fable of Saturn, we have the following meanings:

<sup>44</sup> Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, tome XXX, pp. 44-55.

<sup>45</sup> P. 74, note.

(Literaliter) "Saturn is said to devour his own sons, because a person born under the 'constellation' of Saturn rarely lives."

(Naturaliter) "Saturn devours his own sons, because he signifies Time, and whatsoever is born of Time is by Time wasted and consumed."

(Historialiter) "Saturn was King of Crete, of whom his brother Titan predicted that one of his sons would drive him from the throne. Whereupon he determined to devour his sons and avert the evil fate."

(Allegorice) "An avaricious man, armed with rapine as with a scythe, devours his children, in the sense that by his extortions he impoverishes them and consumes their substance."

The method of interpretation illustrated by the foregoing extract has played a tremendous rôle in the history of human thought. First seen in the fragments of Aristobulus, the method culminated in the work of Philo Judaeus, *On the Allegories of the Sacred Laws*.<sup>46</sup> It developed in an attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy with Jewish legislation,<sup>47</sup> and followed lines that had already been applied to the study of Homer.<sup>48</sup> Founded on the sincerest of motives, and dedicated to the most pious purposes, it came to be regarded during the Middle Ages as a very pillar of the faith. It gave pith and point to religious instruction and furnished ideals for human conduct. The leading exponent of the allegorical method of scriptural interpretation was Origen.<sup>49</sup> Clement of Alexandria declared that all scripture must be allegorically understood.<sup>50</sup> Although there were protests against the views of Origen, and against

<sup>46</sup> Farrar, F. W.: *History of Interpretation*, p. 127.

For a summary of Philo's rules, see pp. 139-157.

Seeberg, R.: *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, I, 52 ff.

Cf. Hatch: *The Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, pp. 59-65; 66-79.

Bigg: *The Christian Platonists*, pp. 56-58; 92; 134.

Davidson, S.: *Sacred Hermeneutics*, Ch. IV.

<sup>47</sup> Farrar, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>48</sup> *Ib.*, p. 125.

<sup>49</sup> *Ib.*, p. 177.

<sup>50</sup> *Ib.*, p. 183.

Cf. Ebert, A.: *Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters im Abendlande*, Vol. I, pp. 139; 147; 150; 215; 245; 378; 516; 550; 596.



what appeared to be hazardous extensions of the idea,<sup>51</sup> the adherents of the allegorical method ultimately carried the day.<sup>52</sup> It became the recognized method of scholastic exegesis, as is exemplified notably in the works of Aquinas.<sup>53</sup> Despite the sincerity of the motives, there is small room for doubt that the persistent tendency to seek for veiled meanings in even the most literal statements exercised a dangerous fascination over certain types of mind, and led directly or indirectly to excess, exaggeration, and puerilities of all sorts. Brunetière remarks in this connection: "Unfortunately, if the intentions were excellent, the method was false;—for the idea did not become clearer in proportion as recourse was had more and more to allegory;—and the writers got further away from truth and nature in the same proportion. This is what Petrarch meant when he made the authors of the *Roman de la Rose* the reproach that their 'Muse' was asleep;—and when he contrasted with their coldness the passionate ardour breathed by the verses 'of those divine singers of love', Virgil, Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid."<sup>54</sup> Before the dawn of critical scholarship such intellectual exercises were doomed to lead to wild inconsistencies when they concerned themselves with the classics. To what lengths they actually did go in this direction Comparetti has given ample illustration in his famous account of Virgil in the Middle Ages.<sup>55</sup> If Virgil became to the popular imagination a wizard and a prophet of Christ, we need feel no surprise when, in 1467, a monk of Paris copies the *Ars Amandi* "ad laudem et gloriam Virginis Mariae."<sup>56</sup> Horace, as Stemplinger has shown, met with the same general treatment.<sup>57</sup> A curiously belated example of the method is to be found in two poems by Laurence le Brun (1607-1663):

<sup>51</sup> Farrar, pp. 206-222.

<sup>52</sup> *Ib.*, p. 239.

See also the summary in Taylor, H. O.: *The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages*, pp. 97-103.

<sup>53</sup> Farrar, p. 271.

Cf. Hauréau, B.: *Histoire de la philosophie scolastique*, Vol. I, Chap. III.

<sup>54</sup> *Manual of the History of French Literature*, trans. by R. Derechef, p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> English trans. by Benecke. London, 1888.

<sup>56</sup> Monnier: *Le Quattrocento*, Vol. I, p. 113.

<sup>57</sup> *Das Fortleben der Horazischen Lyrik seit der Renaissance*, p. 26.

*Virgilius Christianus* and *Ovidius Christianus*. In the second of these the *Metamorphoses* undergo transformation into stories of converted penitents.<sup>58</sup> The spirit of Pierre Bersuire lived on in Webbe, Harington, Golding, Sandys, Garth, and many others; it colored the whole Elizabethan attitude toward Ovid and toward the general interpretation of poetry.

Occasionally, to be sure, a voice was raised in protest. Thus in his *Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale found cause for indignation at the methods of the schoolmen in the fact that, "some will prove a point of the Faith as well out of a fable of Ovid or any other poet, as out of St. John's Gospel or Paul's Epistles."<sup>59</sup> An allegory in itself, he thinks, "proveth nothing, neither can do. For it is not the scripture, but an ensample or a similitude borrowed of the scripture, to declare a text or a conclusion of the scripture more expressly and to root it and grave it in the heart. . . . If I could not prove with an open text that which the allegory doth express, then were the allegory a thing to be jested at, and of no greater value than a tale of Robin Hood."<sup>60</sup> Although he admits the utility of allegory under proper conditions, Tyndale warns expressly against its dangers: "Finally, beware of allegories; for there is not a more handsome or apt thing to beguile withal than an allegory. And contrariwise; there is not a better, vehementer, or mightier thing to make a man quickwitted and print wisdom in him, and make it to abide, when bare words go but in at the one ear, and out at the other."<sup>61</sup> Whitgift is equally plain in his warning as to the dangers attendant upon the method: "All men know how uncertain a reason it is that is grounded upon figures and types, except the application thereof may be found in the scriptures. For a man may apply them as it pleaseth him, even as he may do in allegories."<sup>62</sup> Whitaker argues to the same purpose: "We affirm that there is but one true, proper and genuine sense of scriptures, arising from the words rightly understood, which we call

<sup>58</sup> *Dictionnaire Universelle*, X, p. 291.

<sup>59</sup> Tyndale's Works, Parker Society, I, p. 306.

<sup>60</sup> *Ib.*, p. 428.

<sup>61</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>62</sup> Works, Parker Society, II, p. 92.

the literal: and we contend that allegories, tropologies and analogues are not various senses, but various collections from one sense, or various applications and accommodations of that one meaning . . . . The sense of scripture, therefore, is but one.”<sup>63</sup>

Expressions such as the foregoing were, however, restricted to the field of theological controversy and appear to have exerted little influence on the current application of allegorical interpretation to works of literature. Apparently not even the keenest satire availed at once to wean the minds of readers and commentators from their delight in subtleties and far-fetched interpretations. Letter number 28 of the *Epistolae Virorum Obscurorum*, as translated by Mr. Stokes, reads, in part, as follows:

“I already know by rote all the fables of Ovid in his Metamorphoses, and these I can expound quadruply—to wit, naturally, literally, historically, and spiritually—and this is more than the secular poets can do . . . .

“You will hence understand that nowadays these Poets do but study their art literally, and do not comprehend allegorizing and spiritual expositions: as saith the Apostle, ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God.’

“Now you may ask where I have obtained this subtle skill. I reply that I lately bought a book composed by a certain English Doctor of our Order, Thomas of Wales by name; and the book is all writ concerning Ovid’s Metamorphoses, explaining each story allegorically and spiritually, and its profundity in Theology passeth belief.

“Most assuredly hath the Holy Spirit inspired this man with so great learning, for in his book he setteth forth the harmonies between the Holy Scriptures and the fables of the Poet, and of these you may judge from the instances subjoined.

“Of the Python that Apollo slew, the Psalmist saith, ‘This dragon which thou hast formed to play therein!’ And, again, ‘Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk.’

<sup>63</sup> *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, Parker Society, p. 404.

"Concerning Saturn—who is always feigned an old man, and the father of the gods—devouring his own children, Ezekiel saith: 'The fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee.'

"Diana signifieth the Blessed Virgin, Mary . . . .

"Cadmus, too, seeking for his sister, is a figure of Christ who seeketh for his sister, to wit, the soul of man; and he buildeth a city, that is, the Church.

"Concerning Actaeon, who beheld Diana naked, Ezekiel prophesied, saying 'Thou wast bare and full of confusion, and I passed by thee and saw thee.'

"Not without cause is it written in the Poets that Bacchus was twice born, for by him is denoted Christ, who was twice born. . . .

"Semele also, who nursed Bacchus, is an image of the Blessed Virgin.

"All this, and much more, I have learned out of that book. If you were but with me you should behold marvelous things.

"And that is the way in which we ought to study Poetry."

Here is keen satire of the allegorical method uncontrolled by reason and accurate knowledge, a satire addressed, with a final thrust, to Frater Dollenkopfius (Dunderhead). Rabelais, too, poked fun at the method,<sup>64</sup> though, as may be seen, without destroying so deeply rooted a mental habit, or shaking its hold on such writers as were determined to read moral truths and allegorical lessons into the *Metamorphoses*, and were carried away with the exercise of intellectual subtlety in the face of what were seemingly the greatest difficulties. Rather perhaps it was the very consciousness of such difficulties and the delight in appearing to reconcile them that spurred such minds on to further effort. It was an absorbing game.

In *The Governour* Sir Thomas Elyot gives first place in the study of poetry to Homer, an eminence not called in question in any of the works under review.<sup>65</sup> He recommends, however, that some Latin author be studied along with the Greek: "and especially Virgile; which, in his wark called *Eneidos*, is most like to Homere in latine . . . . and none one autor serueth to so diuers wits

<sup>64</sup> Trans. by Urquhart, Book I, Ch. 58.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *Proloug of the first Buik of Eneados*, by Gavin Douglas, ed. J. Small.

as doth Virgile . . . . . wherefore he is in the order of lernyng to be preferred before any other autor latine.”<sup>66</sup> “I woulde set nexte to him two bookes of Ouid, the one called *Metamorphosios*, whiche is as moche as to say as, chaungynge into other figure or fourme: the other is entituled *De fastis*: where the ceremonies of the gentiles, and especially the Romanes, be expressed: bothe right necessary for the understandynge of other poetes. But by cause there is litell other lernyng in them, concernyng either vertuous maners or policie, I suppose it were better that as fables and ceremonies happen to come in a lesson, it were declared abundantly by the maister than that in the said two bokes, a longe tyme shulde be spent and almost lost: which mought be better employed on suche autors that do minister both eloquence, ciuile policie, and exhortation to vertue. Wherefore in his place let us bring in Horace, in whom is containyd moche varietie of lernynge and quicknesse of sentence.”<sup>67</sup>

Incidentally to his statement of the proper subjects of instruction, Elyot opens what was to prove a long and absorbingly interesting debate by undertaking, “to shewe what profite may be taken by the diligent reading of auncient poetes, contrarye to the false opinion, that nowe rayneth, of them that suppose that in the works of poetes is containyd nothyng but baudry, (suche is their foule worde of reproche), and unprofitable leasinges.”<sup>68</sup> The cause of such an error of judgment is, in Elyot’s opinion, ignorance. “But they whiche be ignoraunt in poetes wyll perchaunce obiecte, as is their maner, agayne these verses, saying that in Therence and other that were writers of comedies, also Ouide, Catullus, Martialis, and all that route of lasciuious poetes that wrate epistles and ditties of loue, some called in latin *Elegiae* and some *Epigrammata*, is nothyng containyd but incitation to lechery.”<sup>69</sup>

Such a view Elyot undertakes to refute by dwelling on the “good sentences”, even in what he regards as the extreme case of “Ouidius, that seemeth of all poetes lasciuious, in his mooste

<sup>66</sup> Croft’s ed., I, p. 66.

<sup>67</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>68</sup> *Ib.*, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> *Ib.*, p. 123.

wanton bokes [who still] hath right commendable and noble sentences; as for proufe thereof I will recite some that I have taken at aduenture."<sup>70</sup> And here he translates lines 131 to 136 of *De Remedio Amoris*. In fine, he makes a plea in extenuation: he cannot deny that there are matters in his author that may justly give offense; but he still maintains that whatever is good in the poet should be turned to enjoyment and profit. On the whole, this may be regarded as a very characteristic expression of the more moderate view that prevailed throughout the period. In the case of Ovid and in that of the poets of love generally it was frankly admitted that occasions for offense to moral ideals were sometimes given. The defense generally made was that such occasions were negligible, or at least should not be allowed to outweigh the excellencies of the poet. So Elyot argues:

"Martialis, whiche, for his dissoulute wrytynge, is mooste seldome radde of men of moche grautie, hath not withstandynge many commendable sentences and right wise counsailes, as among diuers I will reherce one which is first come to my remembrance.

If thou wylte eschew bytter aduenture,  
And auoide the gnawynge of a pensifull harte,  
Sette in no one persone all holy thy pleasure,  
The lasse ioy shalte thou haue but the lasse shalte thou smarte.

"I coulde recite a great nombre of semblable good sentences out of these and other wanton poetes, who in the latine do expresse them incomparably with more grace and delectation than our englishe tonge may yet comprehende.

"Wherefore sens good and wise mater may be picked out of these poetes, it were no reason, for some lite mater that is in their verses, to abandone therefore al their warkes, no more than it were to forbear or prohibite a man to come into a faire garden, lest the redolent sauors of swete herbes and floures shall meue him to wanton courage, or leste in gadring good and holsome herbes he may happen to be stunge with a nettile. . . . Semblablie if he do rede wanton mater mixte with wisdom, he putteth the warst under foote and sorteth out the best, or, if his courage be stered or prouoked, he remembereth the litel pleasure and gret detriment

<sup>70</sup> *Ib.*, p. 133.

that shulde ensue of it, and withdrawynge his minde to some other studie or exercise shortly forgetteth it. . . .

"So all thoughe I do nat approue the lesson of wanton poetes to be taughte unto all children, yet thynke I conuenient and necessary that, whan the mynde is become constant and courage is asswaged, or that children of their naturall disposition be shamfaste and continent, none auncient poete wolde be excluded from the lesson of suche one as desireth to come to the perfection of wyse-dome."<sup>71</sup>

In *The Scholemaster*, published in 1568, Ascham lays no stress on the reading of Ovid: Varro, Sallust, Caesar, and Cicero are his favorites as subjects of instruction. And he approves the dictum of Sir John Cheke—"I would haue a good student passe and iorney through all authors both Greke and Latin: But he that will dwell in these few books onelie: first, in Gods holie Bible, and than ioyne with it, Tullie in Latin, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Isocrates, and Demosthenes in Greke: must nedes proue an excellent man."<sup>72</sup> Erasmus, *De Ratione Studii Commentariolus* (1512) recommends that the teacher "should himself have travelled through the whole circle of knowledge . . . among the poets, Homer and Ovid."<sup>73</sup> Webbe, however, in his essay *Of English Poetry* carries Elyot's view still further: "For surelie I am of this opinion that the wantonest Poets of all, in their most laciuous workes wherein they busied themselues, sought rather by that meanes to withdraw mens mindes (especiallie the best natures) from such foule vices then to allure them to imbrace such beastly follies as they detected."<sup>74</sup>

So far then the lover of poetry and the friend of Ovid had before him certain clearly defined possibilities. Enjoying and appropriating whatever was good in the poet, he could ignore or forget any "unhonest matter", he could regard it as an exemplum, he could "moralize it in its kind", or he could explore the mine

<sup>71</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 123-131.

<sup>72</sup> G. G. Smith: *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I. p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> W. H. Woodward: *Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, p. 167.

<sup>74</sup> G. G. Smith: *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, p. 251.

of allegory for meanings and lessons completely hidden from the eyes of the ignorant reader. And although Homer and Virgil had distinctly greater claims upon his attention, he could find in Ovid "right commendable and noble sentences." Turning now to the more distinctively critical writers, such as are represented in Mr. G. G. Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, one sees at once the limitations and the experimental character of their work. With them the chief object of concern was not Ovid, or indeed any one poet. Rather were they interested in the nature and scope of poetry and in the validity of its claims to the attention of serious men. Such expressions of opinion about Ovid as have come down to us from the more obviously critical writings are, therefore, mainly incidental to the wider and more absorbing question. Sincere if narrow-minded men like Gosson were ready to condemn the art of poetry because of the outrage to their moral ideals which they found in such poems as the *Ars Amandi* or the *Metamorphoses*. Others like Breton felt that poetry was but "a study of Idleness",<sup>75</sup> and to be tolerated only as a form of relaxation from the sober and practical affairs of the day. Others who rallied to the defense of poetry and who insisted that the errors and shortcomings of one poet were not sufficient to condemn the art itself, were nevertheless not always agreed that it was something to be prized and cultivated for its own sake. Golding, Lodge, Webbe, and others, with whatever delight they may have read poetry and discussed it with their intimates, ventured to defend the poems of Ovid only on the ground that superior insight into such matters or the proper method of interpretation enabled them to see deep meanings of moral or philosophical import where ignorant or untrained readers saw only "toyes."

Most blatant of all was Stephen Gosson in his *Schoole of Abuse* (1579). In his strictures on the poetic art he lays stress on the fact that "Ouid bestirreth himself to paint out his Flea<sup>76</sup> . . . . [and shows] his cunning in the inceste of Myrrha, and that trumpet of Baudrie, the Craft of Loue."<sup>77</sup> He expresses approval of the

<sup>75</sup> *A Packet of Letters*, Book II, Letter XVI.

<sup>76</sup> G. G. Smith: *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, p. 364, note. The reference is to the pseudo-Ovidian *De Pulice*.

<sup>77</sup> Arber's ed., p. 19.



fact that Augustus banished the author, whom he terms "the high martial of Venus fiede," and "the amorous Scholemaister."<sup>78</sup> Direct issue to this position is taken in the swiftly ensuing and vigorous *Defence of Poetry* by Thomas Lodge. "Haue you not reason", he asks, "to waye that whatsoeuer either Virgil did write of his gnatt or Ouid of his fley was all couertly to declare abuse? . . . . you remember not that . . . . under the shadow of byrds, beastes, and trees the follies of the world were desiphered; you know not that the creation is signified in the Image of Prometheus, the fall of pride in the person of Narcissus; these are toyes, because they sauor of wisdom which you want."<sup>79</sup> Here again recourse is had to allegory, and the critic is charged with ignorance in that he failed to interpret. Moreover, "Ouids abuses, in describing whereof you labour very vehementlye, terming him lecher, and in his person dispraise all poems: but shall on(e) man's follye destroye a universal commodity? . . . . I like not of an angrye Augustus which wyll banishe Ouid for enuy. I loue a wise Senator, which in wisdom wyll correct him, and with aduise burne his follies."<sup>80</sup> Not content with thus meeting the objections of Gosson, Lodge is drawn on by the fluency of the Latin poet to exclaim: "Who liketh not of the promptness of Ouid? who not unworthily could boast of himself thus, Quicquid conabar dicere versus erat. Who then doth not woonder at poetry? Who thinketh not that it proceedeth from aboue."<sup>81</sup>

The sage and serious doctrine of allegorical interpretation aroused even greater enthusiasm in William Webbe. The essay *Of English Poetry* (1586) has this to say: "Ouid, a most learned and exquisite Poet. The work of greatest profite which he wrote was his Booke of Metamorphosis, which though it consisted of fayned Fables for the most part, and poetical inuentions, yet beeing moralized according to his meaning, and the trueth of euery tale beeing discouered, it is a work of exceeding wysedome and sounde iudgement. If one lyst in like manner to haue knowledge and perfect

<sup>78</sup> Arber's ed., p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> G. G. Smith: *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, p. 65.

<sup>80</sup> *Ib.*, p. 75.

<sup>81</sup> *Ib.*, p. 70.

intelligence of those rites and ceremonies which were observed after the Religion of the Heathen, no more profitable worke for that purpose then his bookes De fastis. The rest of his dooinges, though they tende to the vayne delights of loue and dalliaunce (except his Tristibus wherein he bewayleth his exile), yet surely are mixed with much good counsayle and profitable lessons, if they be wisely and narrowly read.”<sup>82</sup> Webbe believed that his countrymen owed a great debt to Master Arthur Golding, “for his labour in englyshing Ouids Metamorphosis . . . . to profit this nation in all kind of good learning.”<sup>83</sup> Webbe is ready too with an answer to the censure of the moralist: “Nowe, if the ill and undecent prouocations whereof some unbridled witts take occasion by the reading of laciuous Poemes, bee objected—such as are Ouids loue Bookes and Elegies . . . . I thinke it easily aunswered. For though it may not iustlie be denied that these workes are indeed very Poetrie, yet that Poetrie in them is not the essentiall or formall matter or cause of the hurt therein might be affirmed . . . . the workes themseules doo not corrupt, but the abuse of the vsers . . . . Ouid, in his most wanton Bookes of loue and the remedies thereof, hath many pithy and wise sentences, which a heedfull Reader may marke and chose out from the other stuffe.”<sup>84</sup>

Here we are on familiar ground, as we are also in Nashe’s *Anatomic of Absurditie*. “I woulde not haue any man imagine that in praying of Poetry I endeuor to approue *Virgils* vnchast *Priapus*, or *Ouids* obscenitie: I commend their witte, not their wantonnes, their learning, not their lust: yet euen as the Bee out of the bitterest flowers and the sharpest thistles gathers honey, so out of the filthiest Fables may profitable knowledge be sucked and selected. Neuerthelesse, tender youth ought to bee restrained for a time from the reading of such ribauldrie . . . . they that couet to picke more precious knowledge out of Poets amorous Elegies must haue a discerning knowledge.”<sup>85</sup> Furthermore: “When as lust is the tractate of so many leaues, and loue passions the lauish dispence of so much

<sup>82</sup> *Ib.*, p. 238.

<sup>83</sup> Ed. Arber, p. 34.

<sup>84</sup> G. G. Smith: *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, p. 252.

<sup>85</sup> Ed. McKerrow, I, pp. 29-30.

paper, I must needs send such idle wits to the vicar of S. Fooles . . . . Might Ouids exile admonish such Idlebies to betake them to a new trade. . . . Henceforth let them alter their posies of profit with intermingled pleasure, inserting that of Ouid in stead.

"Si quis in hoc artem populo non nouit amandi,  
Me legat, & lecto carmine doctus amet."<sup>86</sup>

The attitude of distrust toward works of the imagination was, however, not to be cleared away by any single utterance, and is perhaps nowhere more characteristically shown than in Breton's *A Packet of Letters*, Book II, Letter 16: "And take heed of Poetry, lest it run away with thy wit: for it hath commonly one of these three properties, belibelling the wicked, abusing the honest, or pleasing the foolish: . . . . in a word, it is more full of pleasure than profit." The same production has this further recommendation: "Doe thou rather reade in an Euening, then make thy dayes worke in the study of idlenesse." Those who delighted in productions, "where more is meant than meets the ear", would fall back on such statements as that of Wilson in *The Arte of Rhetorique*: "For undoubtedly there is no one tale among all the poets, but under the same is comprehended something that pertaineth, either to the amendment of manners, to the knowledge of truth, to the setting forth of Natures work, or els the understanding of some notable thing done."<sup>87</sup> With that belief men like Golding, Sandys, and later Garth himself, would search with the utmost diligence for every trace of concealed meaning that might appear to justify their admiration for a given author and for the art itself. For an expression of this point of view even the most enthusiastic of them could scarcely have asked for more than was offered by Sir John Harington in his vehement *Apologie for Poetrie* (1591). One might almost be tempted to regard the statement as a parody; but Harington believed that he was fighting Philistines, and he was determined to make out his case.

"Perseus sonne of Iupiter is fained by the Poets to haue slaine Gorgon, and after that conquest atchiued, to haue flowen up to

<sup>86</sup> *Ib.*, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ed.* G. H. Mair, p. 195.

heauen. The Historicall sence is this, Perseus the sonne of Iupiter, by the participation of Iupiters vertues that were in him . . . . . slew Gorgon a tyrant in that country (Gorgon in greeke signifieth earth) and was for his vertuous parts exalted by men up into heauen. Morally it signifieth this much, Perseus a wise man, sonne of Iupiter endewed with vertue from aboue, slayeth sinne and vice, a thing base and earthly; signified by Gorgon, and so mounteth up to the skie of vertue." Another allegory is then declared, and "also another Theological Allegorie", until like a schoolman of a later day the triumphant apologist tells us: "the like infinite Allegories I could pike out of other Poeticall fictions saue that I would auoid tediousnes. It sufficeth me therefore to note this, that the men of greatest learning and highest wit in auncient times did of purpose conceale these deepe mysteries of learning . . . . . for sundrie causes; . . . . . that they might not rashly be abused by prophane wits . . . . . [for] conservation of the memorie of their precepts: . . . . . to be able with one kinde of meate and one dish (as I may so call it) to feed diuers tastes. For the weaker capacities will feede themseules with the pleasantness of the historie and sweetnes of the verse, some that haue stronger stomackes will as it were take a further taste of the Morall sence, a third sort more high conceited than they, will digest the allegorie."<sup>88</sup>

Allegorical interpretation had by no means gone out of fashion. It could and did still do yeoman service for the champions of poetry. What a part it played in Elizabethan literary criticism is clearly pointed out by Mr. G. G. Smith.<sup>89</sup> Bacon himself shared the current view of the matter. "Upon deliberate consideration," he says in *De Sapientia Veterum*, "my judgment is that a concealed instruction and allegory was intended in many of the ancient fables." He took great pride in his interpretation of the Orpheus legend. Long before, Sir Thomas Elyot had been sure that: "No man can apprehende the very delectation that is in the leeson of noble poetes unlasse he haue radde very moche and in diuers autors of diuers lernynges."<sup>90</sup> Gascoigne, in his *Notes of Instruction* (1575)

<sup>88</sup> Haslewood, II, p. 128 ff.

<sup>89</sup> G. G. Smith, I, pp. XXIV-XXX.

<sup>90</sup> *The Governour*, Bk. I, Ch. XIII.

regards the ability to write allegorically as a badge of distinction: "I woulde . . . . discover my disquiet in shadowes *per allegoriam*, or use the couertest meane that I could to auoyde the vncomely customes of common writers."<sup>91</sup> Nashe appears to take a sly dig at over-subtle interpretations of Ovidian story thus: "To see how lovingly hee made the sence of the Apostle and Ouids fiction of Phaetons firing of the world to kisse before they parted . . . . was sport enough for us to beguile the way."<sup>92</sup> Gosson, in his *Schoole of Abuse*, is frankly contemptuous of the fashion: "It is a Pageaunt woorth the sight, to beholde how he labors with Mountains to bring foorth Mise."<sup>93</sup> So J. Eachard makes this remark: "It is usually said by those that are intimately acquainted with him, that Homer's Iliad and Odyssey contain, mystically, all the Moral Law for certain, if not a great part of the Gospel (I suppose much after the rate that Rabelais said his Gargantua contained all the Ten Commandments) but perceivable only to those that have a poetical discerning spirit."<sup>94</sup> Owen Felltham was, however, of another opinion. In his *Resolves*<sup>95</sup> he speakes thus *Of Poets and Poetry*: "Surely he was a little wanton with his leisure, that first invented Poetry. . . . But the Words being rather the drossie part, conceit I take to be the principal. And here though it disgresseth from Truth, it flies about her, making her more rare, by giving curious raiment to her nakedness. . . . If the Learned and Judicious like it, let the Throng bray. . . . Two things are commonly blamed in Poetry: nay, you take away That if Them, and these are Lyes and Flattery. But I have told them in the worst words: For 'tis only to the shallow insight that they appear thus. Truth may dwell more clearly in Allegory, or a moral 'd Fable, than in a bare Narration. . . . The greatest danger that I find in it is that it wantons the Blood, and Imagination; as carrying a man in too high a Delight." John Davies of Hereford was moved to declare in *Humours Heauen on Earth*:<sup>96</sup> "Poets, whiche all men

<sup>91</sup> *The Posies*, ed. Cunliffe, p. 466.

<sup>92</sup> Ed. McKerrow, I, p. 89.

<sup>93</sup> G. G. Smith, I, p. 365.

<sup>94</sup> Arber: *English Garner*, VII, p. 253.

<sup>95</sup> Ed. of 1696, p. 96.

<sup>96</sup> His note to stanza 148.

taxe for lying, doe least lie of any, the morall of their fictions considered." No ordinary ridicule sufficed to strike out of the hand of the defender of poetry his trusted weapon of allegory. With that he felt ready to meet any attack.

The most enthusiastic appreciation of the poetry of Ovid occurs in the introduction of Arthur Golding to his famous and widely influential translation of the *Metamorphoses*. In the Dedication of the first four books to Leicester, "at Cecil House, the 23rd day of December, 1564," Golding says:

"If this woorke was fully performed with like eloquence and connyng of endytyng by me in Englishe, as it was written by Thauc-  
thor thereof in his moother tonge, it might perchaunce delight your  
honor . . . . for the number of excellent devices and fine inven-  
tions contained in the same, purporting outwardly moste pleasant  
tales and delectable histories, and fraughted inwardlye with moste  
pithie instructions and wholesome examples, and conteynyng bothe  
wayes moste exquisite connyng and deepe knowledge."

In the dedicatory epistle of 1567 to his noble patron, Golding undertakes to show by elaborate analysis what he regards as the great significance of the poem. Ovid has brought the entire philosophy of "turned shapes" into "one whole masse." The poet shows that nothing persists without change, and that in these changes nothing is lost; that the soul is immortal; and that the Pythagorean view of the transmigration of the soul applies to the spirit of animal life, not to the rational soul.

"and in all are pitthie apt and pleyne

Instructions which import the prayse of vertues, and the shame  
Of vices, with the due rewardes of eyther of the same."

Hence the translator sees in the Daphne story "a myrror of virginitee." In the story of the fall of Phaethon he reads the miserable end of youthful ambition.

"This fable also dooth advyse all parents and all such

As bring up youth, too take good heede of cockering them too  
much.

It further dooth commend the meane: and willeth too beware  
Of rash and hasty promises which most pernicious are,  
And not to bee performèd: and in fine it playnly shoves

What sorrow too the parents and too all the kinred growes  
 By disobedience of the chyld: and in the chyld is ment  
 The disobedient subject that ageinst his prince is bent."

The metamorphoses of the crow and of the raven warn against the consequence of ill report; the mishaps of Ocyrooe show the perils of undue curiosity; and the tale of Battus is to be taken as "a very good example" for the covetous. Those who delight in hawking and hunting, in wantonness and gluttony

"Upon the piteous story of Actaeon ought to think.

For theis and theyre adherents used excessive are in deede

The dogs that dayly doo devour theyre followers on with speede."

Thus to Golding every myth is an exemplum, and from that point of view he thus sums up his account:

"Theis fables out of every booke I have interpreted,

Too shew how they and all the rest may stand a man in sted."

The next object of the translator's concern is to remind his patron that the ancients in their ignorance attributed to many gods what is actually the will of "the true eternall God."

"For Gods, and fate, and fortune are the terms of heathenesse,  
 If men usurp them in the sense that Paynims doe expresse."

These terms Golding proceeds to interpret, admitting the while that their most satisfactory explanation is to be found in Scripture. Nevertheless, he insists that the legends that employ the terms are really of value in promoting virtue and godliness, especially since in the opinion of many pious and learned men the legends originated in Scripture.

"What man is he but would suppose the author of this booke  
 The first foundation of his woorke from Moyses wryghtings  
 tooke?

Not only in effect he dooth with Genesis agree,

But also in the order of creation, save that hee

Makes no distinction of the dayes."

Not only does Golding square to his own satisfaction Ovid's account with that of Moses, but he further argues that the order of creation is in agreement. According to this position Prometheus appears to be "theternall woord of God." The Golden Age finds its counterpart in Eden; the four ages have biblical parallels; and

even the account of the flood is satisfactory, save that Ovid was misled as to the date because in his account he followed "the boastful, shameless Greeks."

In conclusion:

"The readers therefore earnestly admonisht are too bee  
Too seeke a further meaning then the letter gives too see,  
The travell tane in that behalf although it have sum payne  
Yet makes it double recompence with pleasure and with gayne."

No one is more insistent than Golding that the reader is not to take offense at what may appear to him wanton word or lewd matter:

"For sure theis fables are not put in wryghting to thentent  
Too further or allure too vyce: but rather this is ment,  
That men beholding what they bee when vyce dooth reign in stead  
Of vertue, should not let their lewd affections have the head."

In his *Preface to the Reader* Golding makes an earnest attempt to guard against offense "the simpler sort" when confronted with the many names of pagan deities. He sadly admits that:

"The trewe and ever living God the Paynims did not knowe:  
Which causèd them the names of Goddes on creatures too  
bestowe."

For human nature, he explains, corrupted by Adam's fall, lost the original sparks of divine grace and descended into superstitions of all sorts. Satan directing, stars, spirits, animals, and even human passions became objects of worship among the pagans. Myth-makers had, therefore, an ulterior purpose in bestowing the various names of the deities. Hence the names Jove and Juno signify princes; Ops and Saturn, old people; Phoebus signifies the young; Mars, men of war; Pallas, the learned, and so on. Moreover, the proper names stand for various other things which the translator leaves to the interpretation of his readers:

"Now when thou readst of God or man, in stone, in beast, or tree  
It is a mirror of thyself thyne owne estate too see.  
For under feyned names of Goddes it was the poets guyse  
The vice and faults of all estates too taunt in convert wyse  
And likewyse too extoll with prayse such things as doo deserve."

The various metamorphoses are therefore to be interpreted in a spiritual sense, and are related both for pleasure and for profit.



"Pleasant terms and art" are employed by the poet in order to hold the attention to the moral lessons in the legends. And if these lessons are presented in veiled or dark language, it is in order to make their discovery all the more attractive to the reader. On his part certainly good judgment is essential; for in Golding's view the poems are flowers, from which bees will extract honey and spiders poison. Those who cannot brook "the lively setting forth" of the work should recognize their classification as readers and for the time being at least leave the work alone. Thus Golding brings his introduction to a close, not hoping to have equalled "the pleasant style" of his original, "who in that all other doth surmount." He takes satisfaction in having presented to English readers a "sea of goodes and Jewelles," for no other work of Ovid, he believes, has more mysteries, sage counsels, good examples, fine inventions, strange variety, and wealth of information.

Despite the familiar sound of much of this, it is clear that the translator himself believed that he had rendered a real service. His attitude may be defensive and his method of interpretation still resolutely allegorical; but he has a fine and infectious enthusiasm for his original. Twenty years later Webbe recognised the service of Golding to the nation in making accessible "all kind of good learning,"<sup>97</sup> and to narrative poets and dramatists the translation became a treasury of classic myth and legend.

It remains to note some of the chief obiter dicta relating to Ovid during the Elizabethan period. They serve to illustrate the views expressed in the preceding discussion. That the statements here presented are not more numerous or more extensive is due in part to the fact that they antedate historical criticism in England and in part to the fact that where an influence is so widely and persistently felt as was that of Ovid, there is less occasion for specific acknowledgements.

As might be expected, there is expression of the view that Ovid was a corrupting influence. From this point of view the *Ars Amandi* is censured. In several instances the poem is held to be the real

<sup>97</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, ed. Arber, p. 34.

cause for the poet's banishment from Rome. George Whetstone, in his *Rocke of Regarde*, makes Bianca Maria sum up her evil life thus :

"The Arte of Love for exercise I redde,  
And thus my life in Venus court I ledde."<sup>98</sup>

A naive expression of the same view appears in *Tom Tel-Trothes Message*:

"Whilome by nature men and women loued,  
And prone enough they were to loue thereby;  
But when they Ouids ars amendi proued,  
Both men and women fell to lecherie."<sup>99</sup>

The suggestive quality of the poem is recognised by John Day in his *Ile of Guls* (produced in 1605) when he makes the gentleman in the prologue call for scenes "that will make a man's spirits stand on their tip toes, and dye his blood in a deep scarlet like your Ovid's *Ars Amandi*."<sup>100</sup>

John Davies of Hereford regards the poem as the antithesis of his own ideals:

"Whist, Muse, be mute, wilt thou like Naso proue,  
And interlace thy Lynes with levity?  
Wilt thou add Precepts to the Arte of Loue,  
And show thy vertue in such vanity?  
So to pollute thy purer Poesy?"<sup>101</sup>

He makes the as yet unsullied sheet of paper thus exclaim:

"Another (ah, Lorde helpe) mee vilifies  
With Art of Loue, and how to subtilize."<sup>102</sup>

Nicholas Breton reflects the same attitude when he declares: "I will give over *Artem Amandi* and I will with thee to some more worthy study."<sup>103</sup> Two conditions imposed upon Maurice Byrchenshaw when he was granted laureation at Oxford were that he

<sup>98</sup> Ed. J. P. Collier, pp. 20-22.

<sup>99</sup> New Sh. Soc., Series VI, p. 113.

<sup>100</sup> Ed. Bullen, Prologue, pp. 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> Ed. Grosart, I, p. 67.

<sup>102</sup> Vol. II, p. 75, *Papers Complaint*.

<sup>103</sup> *The Wil of Wit*, etc., ed. Grosart, II, p. 12.

should write the required number of verses and promise not to read Ovid's *Art of Love* to his pupils.<sup>104</sup>

Although even now the precise reason for the banishment of Ovid is unknown, Elizabethan writers often ascribe the punishment to the displeasure of Augustus at the character of the *Ars Amandi*. Such is the belief of Thomas Becon: "Was not the poet Ovidius banished of Augustus Caesar for the books which he made *De Arte Amandi* (he might more justly have termed them *De Arte Meretricandi*), because that through the reading of them he corrupteth the minds of the youth."<sup>105</sup> The views of Robert Greene are similar: "Such fantastike poets . . . who with Ouid seeke to nourish vice in Rome by setting down *Artem Amandi*, and giuing dishonest precepts of lust and lecherie, corrupting youth with the expence of time, vpon such friuolous fables; and therefore deserue by Augustus to be banished from so ciuill a countrie as Italie, amongst the barbarous Getes to liue in exile."<sup>106</sup> In *Greenes Mourning Garment* this opinion is reiterated: "Ouid, after he was banished for his wanton papers written *de Arte Amandi*, and his amorous Elegies between him and Corrina, being amongst the barbarous Getes, and though a Pagan, yet toucht with a repenting passion of the follies of his youth, hee sent his *Remedium Amoris* and part of his *Tristibus* to Caesar, not that Augustus was forward in those fancies, or that hee sought to reclaim the Emperor from such faults; but as a gathering by infallible coniectures, that hee which seuerely punished such lasciuious liuers, would be glad to hear of their repentant labours."<sup>107</sup> The legend is repeated in the curious poem entitled *Greenes Vision*.<sup>108</sup>

"Quaint was Ouid in his rime,  
Chiefest poet of his time.  
What he could in wordes rehearse,  
Ended in a pleasing verse,  
Apollo, with his ay-greene baies,  
Crowned his head to shew his praise:  
And all the Muses did agree,

<sup>104</sup> Austin and Ralph: *The Lives of the Poets Laureate*, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Sermons*, Parker Soc., p. 383.

<sup>106</sup> Ed. Grosart, IX, p. 294. Cf. pp. 9; 120; 221; 250.

<sup>107</sup> *Ib.*, p. 120.

<sup>108</sup> *Ib.*, XII, pp. 199-200.

He should be theirs, and none but he.  
This Poet chaunted all of loue,  
Of Cupids wings and Venus doue :  
Of faire Corrina and her hew,  
Of white and red, and vaines blew.  
How they loued and how they greed,  
And how in fancy they did speed.  
His Elegies were wanton all,  
Telling of loues pleasing thrall.  
And cause he would the Poet sceme,  
That best of Venus laws could deeme,  
Strange precepts he did impart,  
And writ three bookes of loues art.  
There he taught how to woe,  
What in loue men should doe,  
How they might soonest winne  
Honest women unto sinne :  
Thus to tellen all the truth,  
He infected Romes youth :  
And with his bookes and verses brought  
That men in Rome naught els saught,  
But how to tangle maid or wife,  
With honors breach through wanton life :  
The foolish sort did for his skill  
Praise the deepnesse of his quill :  
And like to him said there was none,  
Since died old Anacreon.  
But Romes Augustus worlds wonder,  
Brookt not of this foolish blonder :  
Nor likt he of this wanton verse,  
That loves lawes did rehearse  
For well he saw and did espie,  
Youth was sore impaired thereby :  
And by experience he finds,  
Wanton bookes infect the minds,  
Which made him straight for reward,  
Though the censure seemed hard,  
To banish Ouid quite from Rome,

This was great Augustus doome  
 For (quoth he) Poets quilts  
 Ought not for to teach men ils."

In recognition of the moral significance of Ovidian fable, when read with due reservations and in the light of allegorical interpretation, very little appears between the enthusiastic praise of Golding in 1564 and the dedication in 1628 of George Sandys' *Ovids Metamorphoses Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figure*. In his reliance upon the allegorical interpretation of concealed lessons and truths, Sandys was as thoroughgoing as Golding had been; but during the interval far less enthusiasm is expressed. William Webbe regarded the *Metamorphoses* as the most profitable of Ovid's works;<sup>109</sup> and he praised Golding "for his labour in Englyshing Ovids Metamorphosis . . . . to profit this nation in all kind of good learning."<sup>110</sup> In like manner Richard Stanyhurst observes in his preface to his translation of the *Æneid* (1582): "And certes this prehemineny of writing [the interlacing of pleasure with profit] is chieflie . . . . too bee affurded too Virgil in this wurck and too Ouid in his Metamorphosis. As for Ennius, Horace, Iuvenal, Persius, and the rabblement of such cheate Poets, theyre dooinges are, for fauore of antiquitye, rather to bee pacientlye allowed then highlye regarded."<sup>111</sup> It is not improbable that one reason for Stanyhurst's summary dismissal of the "cheate poets" was that they did not appear to him to yield the familiar moralizations. John Taylor found moral lessons in Ovid. Though admitting that he knew no language save his own, he declares that he had read Virgil and Ovid;<sup>112</sup> and in his *Verses Presented to the Kings own Hand* expresses the following opinion:

"In Ouids Metamorphosis I finde  
 Transformed Formes, and strange misshapen Shapes  
 Of humane transmutations from their kind  
 To Wolves, to Beares, to Doggs, to Pyes, to Apes;  
 Yet these were but Poeticall escapes,  
 (Or Morallizing of unnat'rall deeds)

<sup>109</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, ed. Arber, p. 29.

<sup>110</sup> *Ib.*, p. 34.

<sup>111</sup> G. G. Smith: *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, p. 136.

<sup>112</sup> *Workes*, Spenser Soc., Part II, p. 385.

To shew that Treasons, Murders, Incests, Rapes,  
From Bestiall minds, (in human forms) proceeds."<sup>113</sup>

The author of *The Fable of Ouid tretting of Narcissus* recognizes

"Ouids meaning straunge  
That wysdome hydeth with some pleasaunt chaunge."

He furthermore asserts

"That Ouid by this tale no folly ment."<sup>114</sup>

Humfrey Gifford is aware that

"The bookes of Ouids changed shapes  
A story strange doe tell,  
How Orpheus to fetch his wife  
Made voyage unto hell."<sup>115</sup>

Of opposing opinions in this connection perhaps no one is more clearly stated than that which appears in *No Whippinge, nor Trippinge*, etc. (1601):

"Let Ouid, with Narcissus idle tale,  
Weare out his wits with figurative fables.  
Old idle Histories grow to be so stale,  
That clowns almost haue bard them from their tables,  
And Phoebus, with his horses and his stables,  
Leaue them to babies: make a better choise  
Of sweeter matter for the soules reioice."<sup>116</sup>

In *Loves Martyr* (1601), Robert Chester appears to support this idea:

"Away fond riming Ouid, lest thou write  
Of Prognos murther, or Lucretias rape."<sup>117</sup>

Nicholas Breton writes in like manner:

"In Ouids Metamorphosis  
I read there of a spring,  
Whereby Narcissus caught his bane,

<sup>113</sup> Spenser Soc., Vol. XXI, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Pr. by Thomas Hackette, 1560.

<sup>115</sup> *Posie of Gilloflowers*, Grosart's Occasional Issues, I, p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> Ed. C. Edwards, London, 1895.

<sup>117</sup> Ed. Grosart, New Shakespeare Soc., Series VIII, 2, p. 38.

(And) only with looking . . . . .  
 If this be false, blame Ovid then  
 That such a tale would write."<sup>118</sup>

Although the consensus of opinion clearly awards to Virgil primacy among Latin poets, there are some noteworthy variations of sentiment with regard to the rank of Ovid. He is called in the poem *Greenes Vision* "chiefest poet of his time." In the *Gorgious Gallery of Gallant Inventions* occurs the line

"Ouid yet of poets prince, whose wit all others past."<sup>119</sup>

Stanyhurst, as has already been seen, places the *Æneid* side by side with the *Metamorphoses* as preëminent in the mingling of pleasure with profit. In his *Tragical Tales* (1587) George Turberville expresses what must be regarded as the prevailing opinion:

"Two things in cheefe did moue me thus to write,  
 And made me deeme it none offence at all:  
 First Ouids workes bedeckt with deepe delight,  
 Whom we of poets second best doe call."<sup>120</sup>

In the foregoing discussion Ovid has appeared as "the amorous schoolmaster". There are numerous allusions in similar strain. Thus, in the introductory compliments on Chapman's poems, "J. D. of the Middle Temple" writes:

"For love till now hath still a master miss'd  
 Since Ovid's eyes were closed with iron sleep.  
 But now his waking soul in Chapman lives  
 Which shows so well the passions of his soul,  
 And yet this muse more cause of wonder gives,  
 And doth more prophet-like loves art enrol.  
 For Ovid's soul now grown more old and wise,  
 Pours forth itself in deeper mysteries."<sup>121</sup>

"Another" thus expresses himself:

"Since Ovid, Love's first gentle master, died,  
 He hath a most notorious truant been,  
 And hath not once in thrice five ages seen

<sup>118</sup> *Heliconia*, ed. T. Parke, I, p. 188.

<sup>119</sup> Ed. T. Parke, p. 103.

<sup>120</sup> *The Authors Excuse*.

<sup>121</sup> *Works of Chapman, Minor Poems and Translations*, p. LXXIV.

"J. D." is John Davies.

That same sweet muse that was his first sweet guide;  
 But since Apollo, who was gratified  
 Once with a kiss, hunting on Cythnus' green  
 By Love's fair mother, tender beauty's queen,  
 This favor unto her hath not envied,  
 That unto whom she will she may infuse,  
 For the instruction of her tender son,  
 The gentle Ovid's easy, supple muse,  
 Which unto thee, sweet Chapman, she hath done;  
 She makes in thee the spirit of Ovid move,  
 And calls thee second master of her love."<sup>122</sup>

George Turbervile, in reading Ovid,

"found him full of amours everywhere:

Each leaf of loue the title eke did beare."<sup>123</sup>

The works of Greene are full of allusions to Ovid as preceptor in the art of love; and there are numerous allusions such as Gascoigne's "Ouids wanton verse;"<sup>124</sup> *Pasquils Night-cap*, line 3089, "Fond wantonizing Ouid;"<sup>125</sup> Edward Rainsford's allusion to the banishment of "wanton Ouid;"<sup>126</sup> Henry Crosse's employment of the same term,<sup>127</sup> and his further mention of "that grand-maister of wantonnesse, Ouid."<sup>128</sup>

<sup>122</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>123</sup> *Tragical Tales* (1587), under the title *The Authors Excuse*.

<sup>124</sup> *The Posies*, ed. Cunliffe, p. 95.

<sup>125</sup> Grosart's *Occasional Issues*, Vol. V, p. 101.

<sup>126</sup> *Ib.*, VII, p. 104.

<sup>127</sup> *Ib.*, VII, p. 121.

<sup>128</sup> *Ib.*, p. 124.





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